

Message Text

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12
ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00

USIE-00 INRE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSC-05 PA-01

PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 IO-13 AID-05 /069 W
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O 232206Z JUL 76

FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 4037

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR NIACT IMMEDIATE

USCINCSO IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 3596

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, OAS, ES, HO

SUBJECT: ESTIMATE OF POTENTIAL FOR MORE INCIDENTS,
INCREASED TENSIONS
OR OUTBREAK OF WAR

REF: STATE 182723

BEGIN SUMMARY: THE EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT THERE IS A POTENTIAL FOR
FURTHER BORDER INCIDENTS AN INCREASED TENSION. HOWEVER, IT IS
IMPROBABLE THAT THERE WILL BE A REPETITION OF THE 1969 WAR. END
SUMMARY.

1. ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF, LT. COL. CESAR ELVIR SIERRA, TOLD POLOFF
ON JULY 23 THAT THERE HAD BEEN NO INCIDENTS ON BORDER FOR PAST 36
HOURS. HE DISCUSSED HIS MEETING ON JULY 22 WITH COL. ROJAS,
SALVADORAN CHIEF OF STAFF, REGARDING BORDER PACIFICATION (SEE SEPTTEL)

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2. THERE IS NO QUESTIN THAT THE 1969 WAR IS AN ESSENTIAL BACKDROP
FOR AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE PRESENT SITUATION. THE GOH LABELS EL
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SALVADOR AS THE AGGRESSOR DURING THAT WAR AND AS A POTENTIAL

AGGRESSOR BECAUSE IT REQUIRES MORE LAND FOR ITS RAPIDLY INCREASING POPULATION. THE FACT THAT EL SALVADOR WAS NEVER OFFICIALLY LABELLED AN AGGRESSOR MERELY HEIGHTENED HONDURAN ADHERENCE TO THAT VIEW; IN ADDITION, IT IS ALSO CLEAR THAT SOME LEADING HONDURAS HAVE A DEEP EMOTIONAL DISLIKE OF THE "AGGRESSORS" WHICH IS, IN CERTAIN CASES, TINGED WITH THOUGHTS OF REVENGE. THIS PSYCHOLOGICAL PRECEPTION IS SUPPORTED BY THE OFTEN IRRESPONSIBLE AND INFLAMMATORY MEDIA.

3. A FURTHER PROBLEM RELATES TO THE PHYSICAL ISOLATION OF SOME OF THE DISPUTED AREAS AND THEIR LACK OF ADEQUATE MILITARY COMMUNICATIONS. HONDURAN OUTPOSTS IN CERTAIN AREAS ARE LOCATED IN EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TERRAIN WHERE THERE ARE NO ROADS OR RELATIVELY EASY ACCESS ROUTES. THIS PHYSICAL ISOLATION IS COUPLED WITH AN ALMOST TOTAL LACK OF ADEQUATE INTERNAL MILITARY COMMUNICATIONS. THEREFORE, A JUNIOR OFFICER IN CHARGE OF A SECTOR MAY BE THE MOST IMPORTANT SINGLE ELEMENT IN THE SITUATION: PHYSICALLY ISOLATED, WITH LITTLE OR NO COMMUNICATION WITH HIGHER LEVELS OF COMMAND, HE IS OFTEN FACED WITH MAKING DECISIONS ABOUT HOW TO DEAL WITH A SALVADORAN ATTACK OR, AT LEAST, WHAT HE MAY BELIEVE TO BE AN ATTACK. IN THAT REGARD, THERE ARE CIVILIANS WITH ARMS IN SOME OF THE AREAS AS WELL AS CATTLE RUSTLERS AND GROUPS INVOLVED IN CONTRABAND, ANY ONE OF WHICH COULD BE INVOLVED IN AN EXCHANGE OF GUNFIRE. GIVEN A CERTAIN SET OF CIRCUMSTANCES, A JUNIOR OFFICER COULD MAKE A DECISION THAT MIGHT ESCALATE THE LEVEL OF FIGHTING EVEN THOUGH HE HAS ORDERS TO AVOID SUCH A SITUATION.

4. THE GENERAL VIEW THE GOH HAS OF EL SALVADOR, THE NATURE OF THE HONDURAN PRESENCE ON THE BORDER AND THE LACK OF INFORMATION ABOUT WHAT IS TAKING PLACE COULD LEAD THE HONDURANS TO ASSUME THE WORST ABOUT FRONTIER INCIDENTS. IN ADDITION, THE GOH PERCEIVES THAT EL SALVADOR IS INTERNALLY UNSTABLE AND MAY BE SEEKING A WAY TO OVERCOME ITS DOMESTIC DIFFICULTIES BY A MILITARY ACTION. GOH LEADERS HAVE REPEATEDLY TOLD EMBASSY OFFICERS THAT ANOTHER WAR WOULD BE RUINOUS FOR BOTH COUNTRIES AND THAT THEY WILL DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO AVOID SUCH AN OUTCOME. HOWEVER, AS POINTED OUT PREVIOUSLY, AS ESCALATION OF FIGHTING COULD DEVELOP AS A RESULT OF A MISTAKE OR MISCALCULATION. THE EMBASSY ESTIMATE AT THIS TIME IS THAT A REPEAT OF THE 1969 WAR IS IMPROBABLE BUT THAT

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FURTHER BORDER INCIDENTS AND INCREASED TENSION IS CLEARLY POSSIBLE. BARTCH

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